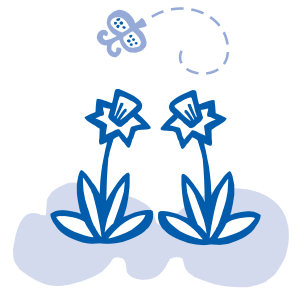




Children and Family Services
Training Center
Department of Social Work
University of North Dakota



Fostering Communications

Winter 2007

Building a Network of People in the Foster Care System

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Accreditation Awarded to RMAC

By Del Hager

The Ruth Meiers Adolescent Treatment Center (RMAC) in Grand Forks recently received the good news they had been awaiting for more than a year. The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), headquartered in Tucson, AZ, approved the accreditation of RMAC. Because of this accreditation the facility also gains the designation as a Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF), bringing the total to six PRTF's in North Dakota.

Besides RMAC, the PRTF Coalition includes Luther Hall-Fargo, Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch-Fargo, Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch-Minot, Pride Manchester-Bismarck, Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch Western Plains-Mandan, along with the Professional Association of Treatment Homes (PATH) as in-state facilities eligible for Medicaid payments to cover costs for their residents.

Bryon Novotny, Director of RMAC, describes CARF as an organization whose function is to "establish best practice standards" but they do not tell a facility how to run their business. "They don't tell you what you can do, but they hold you to what you say you're going to do. They do not say that you can only admit certain types of kids or certain diagnosis, that is not their role. It's the role of each individual facility and the role of the state to decide the criteria for admission," Novotny stated.

He went on to explain that CARF has approximately 1200 standards that they use to rate a facility such as RMAC. There are other accreditation agencies but, "the high standards they use matched closely with what we try to do at RMAC. They were the best fit for us." Novotny began the accreditation process in about August 2005 and the site visit by two CARF reviewers finally took place November 6-7, 2006. They received approval notification in December. RMAC and Pride-Manchester were the final two North Dakota facilities to receive accreditation and the PRTF designation.

THE RMAC PROGRAM

The Ruth Meiers Adolescent Center, a program of Northeast Human Services Center, opened its doors in 1989 in order to serve boys and girls between the ages of 12 and 17 who are experiencing serious emotional disturbances. Novotny stated, "Our goal is to provide treatment that helps stabilize the adolescent so they can 'step down' to a lower level of care as quickly as possible." He went on to explain,

"We have to remember what this setting is about. In residential treatment you are typically working with a resident who has not been successful at other levels of care. We are often not dealing with youth that are coming with a lot of motivation to show you that they are 'the problem' or that they have issues. It's usually quite the opposite. If hard-working people were all it took to be successful with these kids, they would have already been over their difficulties. Many good people have tried to help these kids before they arrive at a residential treatment center. That's why it's more strict and structured. Consistency and routine are emphasized with a heavy emphasis on therapeutic interventions. Nothing else has been working so we have a different approach."

He went on to say, "When a youth arrives we tell them that they're not in trouble. 'You need to work on some issues. You want to get out of here and we want to get you out as fast as we can. This isn't a jail, these doors aren't even locked. You're here to do your treatment; it's your treatment, not ours. We will help you but you need to do it.' It's about them. It's about them working on some things and developing some new skills. They're in charge of that all the way along."

The youth attend treatment review meetings every other week and they participate with all the other people on the team. Some choose to fully participate while others do not because they don't think anyone cares. Novotny said, "We explain that 'this is your chance to make decisions. If you don't participate, the meeting will go on and decisions will be made for you. We can't read your mind.'"

A three-pronged approach is used to meet the needs of the residents. First, a structured routine needs to be established that involves eating nutritional meals, maintaining a consistent schedule, and getting adequate sleep. Secondly, a proper medication regiment is delivered requiring strict compliance. Finally, the cognitive therapeutic work can begin. Once the basic needs are met, the child will be able to move forward more successfully in the treatment phase of the program that includes individual and group therapy, along with academics and work with the family. The development of social skills for the youth to be able to live with ten or eleven other residents is also a difficult adjustment and a major part of treatment.

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Fostering Communications is published quarterly by the UND Children and Family Services Training Center, under the sponsorship of the Division of Children and Family Services, North Dakota Department of Human Services. It is sent free of charge to all foster parents, foster care providers, and child welfare agencies. Comments should be directed to the Training Center.

The basic pillars of the program are respect, honesty, trust and choices. Novotny believes that almost everything that happens in the facility can be related to these pillars. That includes the behaviors of the residents as well as the methods of intervention by staff members.

He said, "We stress accountability for your actions. There may be many reasons for the behavior but the fact remains they need to be responsible for their current behavior. That starts the process of helping the youth figure out how they get angry, for example; how they act when they get angry; and, when they get to that point, how to prevent them from getting into further trouble." Staff will often use the old adage, "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got," to explain the need for change in behavior. "At RMAC, we're not going to let them do what they've always done. We step in. At that point, it feels really hard for the adolescent. When we're redirecting them and asking them to do the things in our program, and they don't like it, we tell them, 'you're learning the new way.' Once they figure it out that we're with them, they realize that this is how they can get out of here faster," Novotny explained.

Transitioning to home or to a foster home is a progressive process. He describes it as "a program of increasing difficulty and expectations, but with that, increased privileges. They develop trust and show that they are successfully working their program. Part of the transition might involve moving from our on-site school to attending part or full days at the public school when they are showing stability. In 2006, 14 of 19 residents (74%) attended off-site school either full or part-time. Work with the custodial agency, the family and other resources in the community, is very instrumental in every transition as well." The hope is for the adolescent to be able to take the new skills they learn at RMAC and apply them to the environment they are moving into.

ADOLESCENT PROFILE AND STATISTICS

The adolescent coming into the program can be characterized with many or all of the following issues (not an all-inclusive list):

- Single parent family
- Abuse victim (physical and/or sexual abuse and neglect)
- Drugs and alcohol present in the environment (personal and/or family use or abuse)
- Poor school attendance
- Poor grades in school
- Eating disorders
- Major depression
- Suicide attempts
- Self mutilation/self harm
- Aggression
- Conduct disorders
- Personality disorders

Statistics from 1998-2006 show that 41% of the youth discharged from RMAC returned to their parental home or the home of a relative; 33% went to a foster home (almost always a PATH home) or group home; and, the remainder were either hospitalized, sent to a detention facility for being Absent Without Leave (AWOL), sent to the Youth Correction Center, or to Attendant Care. The average length of placement was 137 days.

For referral or admissions information to the Ruth Meiers Adolescent Center, please contact Bryon Novotny or Larry Dauksavage, Clinical Director, at (701) 795-3870.



From the State Office

By Tara Muhlhauser, Deputy Director
Children and Family Services Division
Child Protective Services Administrator
ND Department of Human Services

NEW RULE ON FOSTER PARENT FROM ND SUPREME COURT

On March 1, 2007, the North Dakota Supreme Court issued a new rule on Foster Parent notification. This new rule clarifies that all foster parents, adoptive parents and relative caregivers are to be notified of court hearings involving a child(ren) for whom they are providing care.

The new rule reads as follows:

RULE 4.2 NOTICE TO INTERESTED PARTIES

In any matter involving a child in foster care under the responsibility of the state, the state must notify the child's foster parents, pre-adoptive parents and relatives providing care for the child whenever any proceeding is held with respect to the child.

[EXPLANATORY NOTE]

Rule 4.2 was adopted, effective March 1, 2007, in response to Public Law 109-239, which requires states receiving certain federal funds to have a foster parent notice rule. The requirement is codified at 42 U.S.C. § 629h(b)(1).

Section 475 [42 U.S.C. § 675] requires that states provide a case review system under which foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, or relatives providing care for a child receive notice of proceedings and are given a right to be heard.

With this new rule, foster parents can expect that they will receive notice of all court proceedings from the custodial county. While the rule doesn't designate who will provide the notice, it is likely the notice will come from the county social service office (child welfare) or from the office of the States Attorney.

While this rule provides an assurance that foster parents will know about each hearing that involves the child in their home, this doesn't give foster parents the rights of a legal "party" in the case. In other words, you cannot be assured as foster parents that you will be invited or allowed into the courtroom. That right is reserved for parties and is a decision that the judge or juvenile referee makes on a case-by-case basis. As a foster parent you can request the opportunity to be in the courtroom (and if you want to be in the courtroom, you clearly should make that known to your caseworker and the States Attorney). You may wish to be given the opportunity to offer words to the court/judge in the courtroom. Again, there is no assurance that you will be invited or allowed to give factual testimony or an opinion to the court. If you wish to do so, make the request and discuss this request with your caseworker, and if recommended by your caseworker, the States Attorney.

And finally, if you don't receive notice of a hearing, and you know that a hearing is planned, talk with your caseworker as soon as possible. This opportunity to have notice and to be made aware of upcoming court decisions is an important step to bring foster, adopt and relative caregivers closer to and more involved with the legal decision-making process for the child(ren) in their home.

Burdick Job Corps-North Dakota's Best Kept Secret

By Rae Schobinger

There aren't too many things in life that are free. Nevertheless, one of the best-kept secrets is Job Corps. It's free and it might be for you or someone you know. However, first you have to understand what it is and what it isn't. It is a great place to get vocational training, academic education, social skills training, independent living skills and more. It isn't a place where only troubled kids go.

Job Corps is one of the greatest opportunities for young adults to get what they need to become taxpaying citizens. Moreover, that's all the government asks those who attend to give back, to simply become a taxpaying citizen, so programs like Job Corps can continue.

In addition, the best thing about Job Corps is that it is right in your backyard. Burdick Job Corps opened its doors in September 1994 in a residential area in northwest Minot. If you've ever driven by, you would be hard pressed to realize that each and every day, 250 young adults, more than 90% of them, from across North Dakota live there, go to school there, are trained there and play there. Neighbors don't complain. In fact, many enjoy the way students give back to their neighborhood, city and state. There is no fence around the Job Corps Center, there are no locks on the doors, the campus is open, clean, well kept and oh, did I mention, THE SAFEST IN THE NATION!

Oh yes, out of 122 Job Corps Centers across the country, Burdick Job Corps in Minot is THE SAFEST in the nation. As a parent, community member and student, that has to matter.

However, it doesn't stop there. Burdick Job Corps not only is the safest in the nation, but also is currently ranked the 7th best Job Corps Center nationwide. Out of 122 Job Corps Centers, North Dakota has THE SAFEST and for more than three years running, has ranked in the TOP 10 in the nation. The ranking is based on a number of factors established by Congress including: GED or High School Diploma attainment; Vocation Training completion; Literacy and Numeracy gains; Initial Job Placement; and, Wage. Six month and twelve month follow up surveys after leaving Job Corps are used to determine if students are still working and what are they making.

Based on all of those statistics and more, Burdick Job Corps, the one in your community and your state, for more than three years running, has consistently ranked in the top 10 Job Corps Centers in the nation. Would you as a taxpaying citizen of the state expect anything less?

Students who attend Job Corps have the opportunity to complete their academic training (if needed), gain the skills and certifications in one of our nine trade areas and learn social skills and career success skills to get and keep a job. At Job Corps we call it the ability to be employable and promotable. Advanced Career Training opportunities are also available, including attending Minot State University while at Job Corps. In addition, employers across the state work with Job Corps to offer both paid and unpaid positions to our students while they are still enrolled. It's a chance for the students to test their skills and a chance for employers to test our students.

However, it doesn't end there. We have staff across the state and country that track students for up to 18 months after leaving the program. If students need help updating a resume', looking for a new job, help with paperwork to enter college, looking for an apartment, child care, etc. we are there to help them long after they leave.

Job Corps is a federally funded program with a 42-year history. It's one of few programs with such a long track record of success. The most recent study indicates that for every dollar the government puts into the Job Corps program, \$2.02 is returned. Not a bad investment into the young people of our country.

So how does a young person qualify? Two basic criteria are age and income. Students have to be at least 16 and not yet 25 years old to attend and they must meet income guidelines. Foster children automatically qualify. I encourage you to call us for more details.

If this is the first time you have heard about Job Corps, I encourage you to learn more by visiting our website at www.burdickjobcorps.com or give us a call at 701-857-9600. Better yet, why not come and see us. Tours are available anytime. Just get in touch and we'll make arrangements and even buy you lunch at our cafeteria.

I have worked at Burdick Job Corps for more than six years. There is nothing finer than to watch a young person walk in the doors as a child with little or no direction and leave as an adult with the confidence and tools to do the only thing the government asks in return for this opportunity - to become a gainfully employed taxpaying citizen.

You must know someone who could benefit from Job Corps? If so, put them in touch with us. You could help change a life!

(Rae Schobinger is the Director of Outreach/Admissions & Career Transition Services, Burdick Job Corps, Minot. 1-701-857-9611)

**April is
Child Abuse
Prevention
Month**



2007 IFCO Conference – New Zealand

by Pete Tunseth

On February 11, 2007, over 500 participants from nearly 40 countries gathered for the Fifteenth Biennial International Foster Care Organization Conference in Hamilton, New Zealand. We were warmly welcomed at the opening session with the traditional Maori (traditional indigenous New Zealanders) greeting “kia ora.” The warmth of the greeting set the tone for conference participants throughout the week as we were overwhelmed with the hospitality of the people of New Zealand.

The conference theme, “Fostering our Taonga (treasure)” provided the perfect message for all conference participants. The message was clear. Children are our treasure as are those who care for them. We are responsible to care for all of those treasures within our communities.

As I thought about the theme of the conference and observed the gathering of the nations, I was struck by the unity of purpose of people from all over the world. Keith Henderson (Ireland), President of IFCO, remarked at the opening, “We are all gathered for one purpose, to care for the children.” Each country has its unique challenges, but

common themes have emerged internationally,

such as increasing levels of trauma experienced by the children and their levels of psychological, emotional and behavioral disturbance. Additional changes within societies have affected the availability of resource families. The more I spoke with friends from Norway and Australia and Japan and Ireland and Finland and New Zealand and Korea and the United Kingdom and Argentina and Canada and numerous other countries, the more I began to understand

that we cannot solve the dilemmas we face without sharing our ideas and resources internationally. One of our most exciting opportunities during the conference was to share successes and challenges of PRIDE with our sister countries in Norway, Finland and Denmark. Sharing a common approach to training foster parents united us in our commitment to fostering our taonga.

I was inspired by many of the speakers and their messages, but I was specifically struck by the message of Mick Brown during his plenary address on Monday morning. Judge Brown served as District Court Judge and the first principal judge of the New Zealand Youth Court. Judge Brown, a Maori native, was raised in foster care. He spoke fondly of his whanau (family) as his treasure and challenged us to think about what society’s response should be to foster care. Wherever we are we have a “personal obligation within a community of concern.” Each one of us is responsible to ensure that the children receive all the care and love they need. We are all responsible to foster our children, to foster our treasures.



International Foster Care Organization Conference reception. Our European partners in PRIDE training: (L to R) Tone Nordby (Norway), Raili Back-Kiianmaa (Finland), Pirjo Hakkarainen (Finland), Lotte Juul-Wiese (Denmark), Ragnor Simonsen (Norway), Del Hager and Pete Tunseth.



Pete Tunseth (L) and Del Hager (R) presenting a workshop on the PRIDE program at the IFCO Conference in New Zealand.



Local representatives at the International Foster Care Organization Conference, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand: (back row L to R) Sarah Larson, St. Paul; Jan Kjelland, PATH foster parent; Tenille Klosterman, PATH social worker; Vickie Meyer, PATH foster parent; Bobbi Geiger, PATH Assitant Director of Operations. (front row) Pete Tunseth, Director, CFSTC; Del Hager, Training Coordinator, CFSTC; and Jim Hooge, PATH foster parent.

Kids Are Waiting. Fix Foster Care Now

(Reprinted with permission from Kids Are Waiting)

Kids Are Waiting: Fix Foster Care Now is a national, nonpartisan campaign dedicated to ensuring that all children in foster care have the safe, permanent families they deserve by reforming the federal financing structure that governs our nation's foster care program.

The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, a national, nonpartisan, blue-ribbon panel, concluded that changing the way the federal government pays for foster care would help states provide services tailored to the needs of each child and family. These reforms will prevent children from needing to be placed in foster care, limit the amount of time they spend in care, and help them leave the system quickly to join a safe, permanent family.

Kids Are Waiting promotes federal foster care financing reform that maintains the current federal-state partnership while providing states with greater incentives and flexibility to tailor services to prevent the need for foster care and to swiftly move children out of foster care to safe, permanent families. Kids Are Waiting is a collaboration of leading child welfare, family, judicial and other organizations promoting federal foster care financing reform. The campaign supports maintaining the current federal-state partnership while providing states with greater incentives and flexibility to provide supports and services that can keep families together, reunify them quickly and safely, and, when that is not possible, help them leave foster care to join safe, permanent families through adoption or guardianship. Led by The Pew Charitable Trusts, an ever-growing number of local, state and national partners are working together so that our most vulnerable children don't spend their childhoods waiting for the families they deserve.

For more information, or to learn how you can get involved, contact info@kidsarewaiting.org.

Join Us

Kids Are Waiting is a national campaign designed to reform federal financing of foster care and improve the lives of the 500,000 children waiting for permanent families. Meaningful change will take the efforts and energy of many. To get involved with Kids Are Waiting, please contact info@kidsarewaiting.org.

MAY IS NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH

**CELEBRATE WITH YOUR LOCAL FOSTER
PARENTS AND FOSTER CARE AGENCIES!!**



1,314 North Dakota Children in Foster Care are Waiting for Reform

(Reprinted with permission from Kids Are Waiting)

The Chief Justices of the nation's state courts have made improvement of the Child Welfare system a priority. North Dakota ranks very high in this area nationally, but we cannot be complacent.

- North Dakota Supreme Court Chief Justice from the State of the Judiciary

Children in foster care would benefit from federal financing reform, which would let states use funds flexibly to provide services before, during and after foster care. Savings could be reinvested: to reunite children with their families, place them with adoptive families, or provide guardianships when reunification and adoption are not possible.

In North Dakota, only 12.0% of federal dollars for child welfare can be spent flexibly to serve children and families. Approximately \$1.3 million dollars out of a total of \$11 million child welfare dollars are flexible.

Who are North Dakota's children waiting in the foster care system?

- 1,314 children in foster care
- 27% of foster children are between ages of 0 and 5
- 24% of foster children are between ages of 6 and 12
- 49% of foster children are between ages of 13 and 21
- Average number of birthdays a child spends in foster care:
1 birthday (17 months)
Nationally: 2.5 birthdays (30 months)
- 36% of children experience three or more foster care placements
Nationally: 42%
- 30% (399) of children live in group care or institutional settings
Nationally: 19% (96,593)

What are North Dakota's foster children waiting for?

- 684 (52%) are waiting to be reunified with their birth families
Nationally: 250,790 (48%)
- 277 (21%) are waiting to be adopted
Nationally: 116,031 (22%)
- Average time foster care children have been waiting to be adopted: 32 months
Nationally: 42 months

Where did North Dakota's children go after leaving foster care in 2004?

- 874 children exited foster care
- 483 (55%) were returned to their parents
- 88 (10%) were adopted
- 47 (5%) left to live with relatives or via guardianships
- 62 (7%) "aged out" of foster care at 18 or older
- 178 (20%) left for other reasons (ran away, transferred, died)

**Data from AFCARS (2004), ASPE Claims Reports (2005), and ACF Budget Reports (2005).*

**National Foster Parent Association
37th Annual Education Conference**

**May 23-27, 2007
Omni Shoreham Hotel • Washington, D.C.**

"Foster Parents in Action-Strengthening Our Voice"

Foster parents should contact your licensing agency
for reimbursement information. Conference
details can be found at www.nfpainc.org.

**North Dakota
Foster Parent Association
Annual Training Conference**

**October 5-6, 2007
Seven Seas Inn & Convention Center
Mandan, ND**

Reimbursement is available for foster parents to attend!

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